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ABSTRACT

A study of 19 eighth graders with behavioral disorders in Quebec evaluated the effectiveness of a social and school-related skills training program in which goals were decided by the students, their teachers, and their parents. A first year pilot study assessed the effect of parent and teacher participation in the selection of skills to be learned by students (n=6) and the transfer of those skills to a special education class. Results showed a decrease, as perceived by teachers, in attention problems and an improvement in social and school-related skills, even though systematic observation of behaviors in the classroom is less conclusive. The second year study assessed the impact of a social skills training program on 19 students with behavioral disorders that included a teachers' assistance team program targeting in-class behavior management. Results showed a decrease, as perceived by parents, in behavior problems and improvement in social skills according to parents and a self-evaluation, and teacher interviews note positive changes in student behavior but these changes do not appear to be permanent. Factors that may contribute to enhancing skill transfer and maintenance are presented and the implication of these results are discussed. (Contains 16 references.) (Author/CR)

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THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN THE SELECTION OF SOCIAL SKILLS WITH BD SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effect of a social and school related skills training program for secondary school students with learning and behavior problems.

A first-year pilot study assessed the effect of parent and teacher participation in the selection of skills to be learned by students and the transfer of these skills to a special education class. Results show a decrease, as perceived by teachers, in attention problems and an improvment in social and school related skills, even though systematic observation of behaviors in the classroom is less conclusive.

The second year assessed the impact of a social skills training program on students with behavior disorders with, in addition, a teachers' assistance team program targeting in-class behavior management. Pretest-posttest control group design, with an experimental single case design for 3 subjects was used. Results show a decrease, as perceived by parents in behavior problems and improvment in social skills (parents and self evaluation), but no change was perceived by teachers or by the observation of classroom behavior. Factors that may contribute to enhance skill transfer and maintenance are presented and the implication of these results will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous research studies suggest that students with behavioral disorders lack in social skills necessary in order to be accepted by their school peers (Gresham, 1986; Kauffman, 1993) and are often perceived by their teachers as "socially incompetent" (Gresham, 1982).

Social skills training and various intervention programs, related to the social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) have been developed to answer BD students' needs (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). Nonetheless, although promising, social skills training interventions produced mixed results : adolescents meet difficulties with maintaining new behaviours and transferring learned skills to situations outside the training setting (Mc Connell, 1987). Therefore, these students do not become more socially acceptable or accepted in natural environments (Kauffman, 1993).

According to Mc Connell (1987) maintaining and transferring problems could lie in the fact that the selected skills to be learned may be worthwhile to the student but not to the significant adults around him/her (parents or teachers). In such cases, there is no guarantee that these new skills will be reinforced by the adolescent's environment (Kaufman, 1993). These considerations are in accord with Meadows, Neel, Parker and Timo (1991) and Melloy's conclusions (1991) which state the need to develop an individualized and functionnal list of critical social skills for a given student in a given environment.

The purpose for this research study was to evaluate a social skills training program in which goals were decided by students with adaptation or behavior disorders, their teachers and parents.

The specific objective of this study was to determine if the participating students: a) would be perceived by their teachers and parents as less behaviorally disordered; b)would perceive themselves and be perceived by their teachers and parents as more socially competent; c) would be perceived by their teachers as having improved their academic skills; d) would demonstrate a

decrease in disturbing behaviours, as measured by behavioural observations within the classroom context.

FIRST YEAR : PILOT STUDY

PARTICIPANTS

Six boys (equivalent to 8th graders; mean age 15,8 years) coming from one special education class (cheminement particulier temporaire) participated to the first stage of the study.

TRAINING PROGRAM

Adolescents received a french adaptation of the social skills training program *Prepare Curriculum*, developed by Goldstein (1988). Training typically occurred three or four times per week in sessions of 75 minutes in length over ten weeks. Sessions were integrated into the regular class schedule but took place outside the classroom. Training leaders phoned parents once a week and held regular meetings with teachers to inform them about activities. A token economy system was used to reinforce students for their participation during training sessions.

MEASURES

- Behavior Dimensions Rating Scale (Bullock & Wilson, 1989)
- Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliot, 1990)

Preintervention-postintervention measures were teachers', parents' and self-ratings.

- A behavioral observation system was conducted in the classroom by two research assistants (three students were observed).

PILOT STUDY RESULTS

Table 1 presents BDRS results.

TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations of BDRS Pre-Posttest Scores

		Participants	
		M	SD
Aggressive/acting out	Pre	57,17	(6,88)
	Post	57,17	(9,62)
Irresponsible/inattentive	Pre	62,67	(8,59)
	Post	57,83	(10,36) **
Socially withdrawn	Pre	55,33	(3,88)
	Post	53,50	(10,97)
Fearful/anxious	Pre	56,50	(8,09)
	Post	58,00	(12,35)

- Results show a significant difference ($t=3,51$, $p<.01$) between pretest and posttest scores on subscale 2 (irresponsible/inattentive).

Table 2 presents SSRS results.

TABLE 2

Means and Standard Deviations of SSRS Pre-Posttest Scores

		Participants	
		M	SD
Teacher form			
• social skills	Pre	90,67	(14,49)
	Post	97,17	(12,29) *
• Problem behavior	Pre	108,33	(10,76)
	Post	108,00	(14,52)
• Academic competence	Pre	88,67	(14,32)
	Post	96,83	(14,70) **
Parent form			
• Social skills	Pre	100,17	(5,19)
	Post	105,60	(13,39)
• Problem behavior	Pre	87,17	(5,31)
	Post	87,20	(3,19)
Student form			
• Social skills	Pre	105,33	(7,99)
	Post	116,67	(10,65) *

- Significant differences appear between pre and posttest results on the teacher form social skills subscale ($p<.05$) and academic competence subscale($p<.01$). Table 2 shows significant pre-posttest differences ($p<.05$) on self-report ratings (social skills).
- Behavioral observation data demonstrate no evidence of a decrease in inappropriate behaviors in the classroom.

SECOND YEAR : EXPERIMENTATION

METHOD

SUBJECTS

The study took place at a secondary school in the Quebec city suburban area (1 500 students), the socio-economical status ranged from middle to high (M.É.Q., 1992). 11 boys and 4 girls (n=15) were drawn at random from secondary 2 (equivalent to 8th grade) students officially identified as presenting behavioral disorders. A comparison group was made up of 15 BD students drawn at random from 7th grade.

PROCEDURE

Pretest-posttest control group design, with an experimental single case design for 3 subjects was used.

TRAINING PROGRAMS

SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM

IEP's were used to establish a consensus among the adolescents, their parents and teachers regarding which social skill(s) had to be fostered or acquired. Those skills were determined by the SSRS procedure (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The adolescents received a french adaptation of the social skills training program *Prepare Curriculum*, developed by Goldstein (1988). Training typically occurred two or three times per school period (schedule extends over 9 days) in sessions of 75 minutes in length over 15 weeks. Sessions were integrated into the regular class schedule but took place outside the classroom. A token economy system was used throughout the training period. A typical session

included 4 steps: 1) modeling (training leader presents and demonstrates skill components); 2) role playing (intends to serve as behavioral rehearsal or practice for future use of the skill); 3)performance feedback (provides adolescents with encouragement to try out the role-played behaviors in real life); 4)transfer training (skill homework or classroom assignment and other planning procedures that may help to maximize transfer).

TEACHERS' ASSISTANCE TEAM PROGRAM

Teachers of participating students met together once every school period (nine days schedule) throughout the social skills training program. These meetings focused on behavior management in the classroom, behavior problems, including cases of non-participating students. Discussions and meeting activities were guided by a form, inspired by the "Mount Epson school staff meeting form", described by Walker & al., (1995). Teachers were encouraged to use a positive behavior reinforcement system.

MEASURES

- Behavior Dimensions Rating Scale (Bullock & Wilson, 1989) was completed by two teachers as a pre and postintervention measure.
- Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliot, 1990) was used as a pre and postintervention measure to assess students' social skills (teachers', parents', and self-reporting ratings). It was also used as an intervention tool in order to choose the skills for training sessions.
- A behavioral observation system had been conducted in the classroom by two research assistants (three participants were observed). Observation sessions took place in a natural environment (classroom) once a day or once every two days. Observers noted the nature and frequency of student'behaviors and the reinforcement used by teachers in the classroom.

- School periods lost due to suspensionss of participating students have been compiled.
- Teachers were interviewed regarding their perception of the assistance team program.

RESULTS

Table 3 presents BDRS results for the control group and experimental group.

TABLE 3

Means and Standard Deviations of BDRS Pre-Posttest Scores

		Intervention		Control	
		M	SD	M	SD
Aggressive/acting out	Pre	61,81	(8,39)	57,86	(8,08)
	Post	62,07	(7,62)	56,50	(11,25)
Irresponsible/inattentive	Pre	45	(7,48)	44,59	(5,85)
	Post	48,10	(7,53)	47,60	(7,37)
Socially withdrawn	Pre	49,33	(9,51)	48,22	(10,64)
	Post	51,30	(12,04)	54,80	(14,37)
Fearful/anxious	Pre	34,96	(7,48)	33,45	(5,86)
	Post	35,33	(6,31)	35,40	(5,33)
Total scale	Pre	191,71	(18,37)	184,14	(20,29)
	Post	196,80	(20,51)	194,30	(28,15)

- Results show a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) for the experimental group between pretest and posttest scores on the socially withdrawn subscale.

Table 4, 5, 6 present SSRS results for the control group and experimental group .

TABLE 4

Means and Standard Deviations of Pretest-Posttest Self report Scores by Condition

		Intervention		Control	
		M	SD	M	SD
Self-report Social skills					
Cooperation	Pre	13,78	(2,42)	13,42	(4,36)
	Post	12,21	(3,02)	13,5	(4,12)
Assertion	Pre	14,15	(2,12)	12,21	(3,02)
	Post	15	(2,12)*	13,38	(2,84)
Self-control	Pre	9,62	(3,89)	11	(3,54)
	Post	9,31	(3,92)	10,77	(2,74)
Empathy	Pre	14,43	(3,18)	14	(3,09)
	Post	15,71	(2,73)	12,86	(2,63)*
Total scale	Pre	51,75	(8,67)	50,90	(9,37)
	Post	52,50	(9,40)	51	(9,13)

Group comparisons

- significant difference ($p<.05$)on the posttest between the two groups: experimental group students perceived themselves as having more assertion skills than the control group;

- significant difference (p<.05)on the pretest between the two groups: control group students perceived themselves as more empathic than the control group.

Pre-posttest comparisons for both groups

- significant differences (p<.05) between pre and posttest scores for the control group: students perceive themselves as more assertive and less empathic than before intervention;
- significant differences between pre and posttest scores for the experimental group : students perceive themselves as less cooperative (p<.01) and more assertive (p<.05) than before intervention.

TABLE 5

Means and Standard Deviations of Pretest-Posttest Parent Report Scores by Condition

		Intervention		Control	
		M	SD	M	SD
Parent form					
Social skills					
Cooperation	Pre	8,66	(3,92)	12,67	(3,20)*
	Post	9,41	(3,2)*	12,67	(2,65)
Assertion	Pre	13,75	(2,67)	14,11	(3,62)
	Post	14,33	(2,67)	13	(3)
Self-control	Pre	10	(4,06)	12,38	(3,46)
	Post	12,20	(3,43)	12,38	(2,24)
Responsability	Pre	14,08	(1,97)	16,78	(1,92)*
	Post	15,31	(1,97)	16,68	(2,35)
Total scale	Pre	47	(7,92)	56,12	(10,97)*
	Post	52	(8,23)	54,38	(9,21)
Problem behaviors					
Externalizing	Pre	2,5	(1,51)	2	(1,12)
	Post	1,83	(1,12)	1,78	(0,83)
Internalizing	Pre	5,33	(2,02)	5,11	(2,42)
	Post	3,67	(2,71)	4,89	(2,26)
Total scale	Pre	7,83	(3,27)	7,11	(3,41)
	Post	5,5	(3,5)	6,67	(3,04)

Group comparisons

- significant difference on the pretest between the two groups: control group students are considered by parents as more cooperative (p<.01), more responsible (p<.05), and having more social skills (p<.01) than experimental group students ;
- significant difference on the posttest between the two groups: experimental group students are considered by parents as less cooperative (p<.01) than control group students.

Pre-posttest comparisons for the experimental group

- significant difference (p<.01) between the pre and posttest for the experimental group : students are considered by parents as having less internalizing and externalizing behavior problems than before intervention, same results (p<.005) appear on the problem behaviors total scale.

TABLE 6

Means and Standard Deviations of Pretest-Posttest Teacher Report Scores by Condition

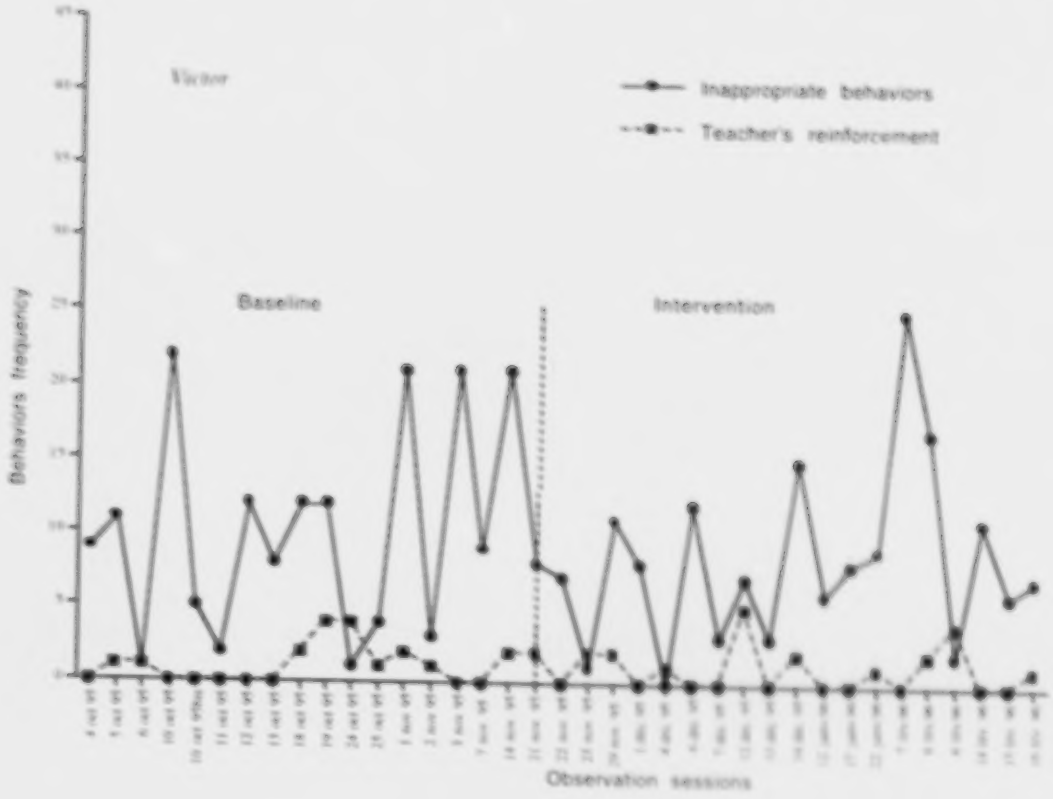
		Intervention		Control	
		M	SD	M	SD
Teacher form					
Social skills					
Cooperation	Pre	11,10	(4,36)	12	(4,18)
	Post	9,4	(2,12)	10,89	(3,72)
Assertion	Pre	6,12	(3,09)	6,09	(2,89)
	Post	7,38	(4,96)	8,2	(3,43)
Self-control	Pre	9,44	(2,83)	7,7	(2,58)
	Post	9,44	(2,88)	9,3	(3,59)
Total scale	Pre	26,83	(6,27)	29	(4,43)
	Post	24,50	(6,86)	30,17	(7,94)
Problem behaviors					
Externalizing	Pre	2,64	(1,99)	2,62	(2,26)
	Post	3,92	(1,44)	5,23	(3,88)
Internalizing	Pre	4,57	(3,3)	3,91	(3,62)
	Post	6,07	(2,46)	5,64	(2,94)
Total scale	Pre	7,69	(4,29)	10,15	(3,16)
	Post	10,15	(3,16)	10,73	(4,38)
Academic competence					
	Pre	36	M.D.	25	(4,32)
	Post	29	M.D.	21,25	(5,74)

Pre-posttest comparisons for both groups

- significant difference ($p<.05$) between the pre and the posttest for experimental group : students are considered by teachers as less cooperative than before intervention;
- significant difference ($p<.001$) between the pre and posttest for both groups on problem behaviors: students are considered by teachers as presenting more behavior problem ($p<.01$), more internalized problems ($p<.01$), and more externalized problems ($p<.01$).

- Teachers interviews indicate general satisfaction with the assistance team program. Teachers note positive changes in student behaviors but those changes do not seem to be permanent. They feel more competent with behavior management in the classroom,and agree with a continuation of the program next year.

- Behavioral observation data appear on the following figures.



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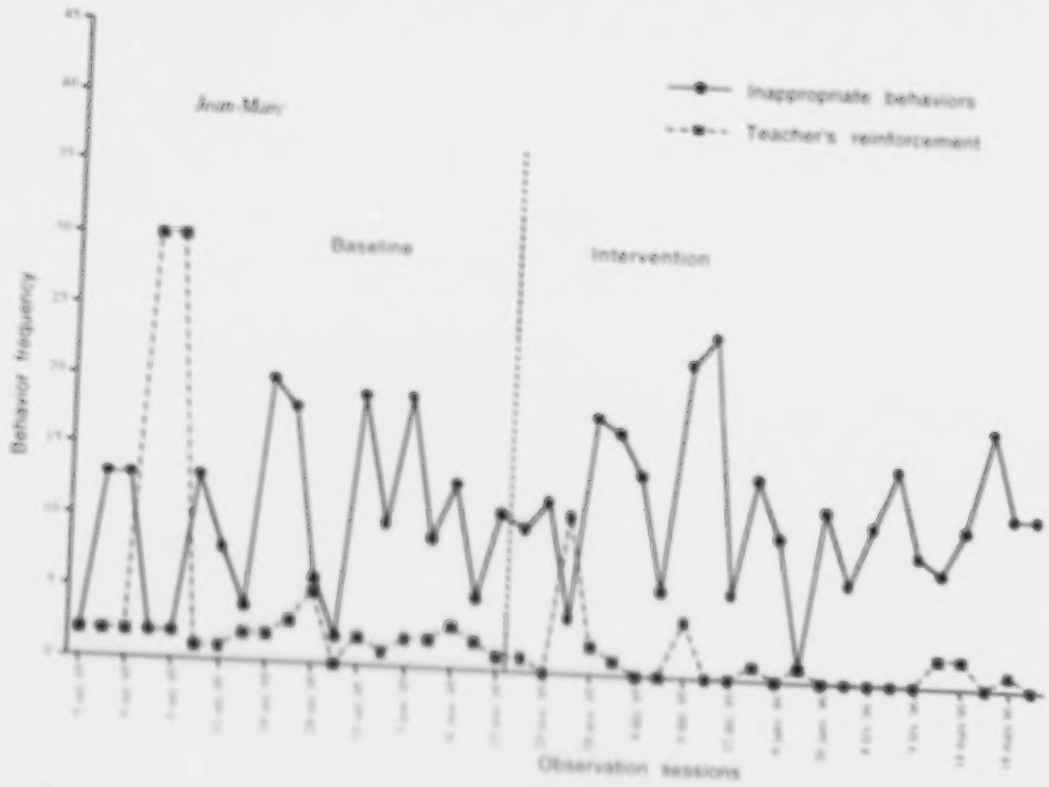

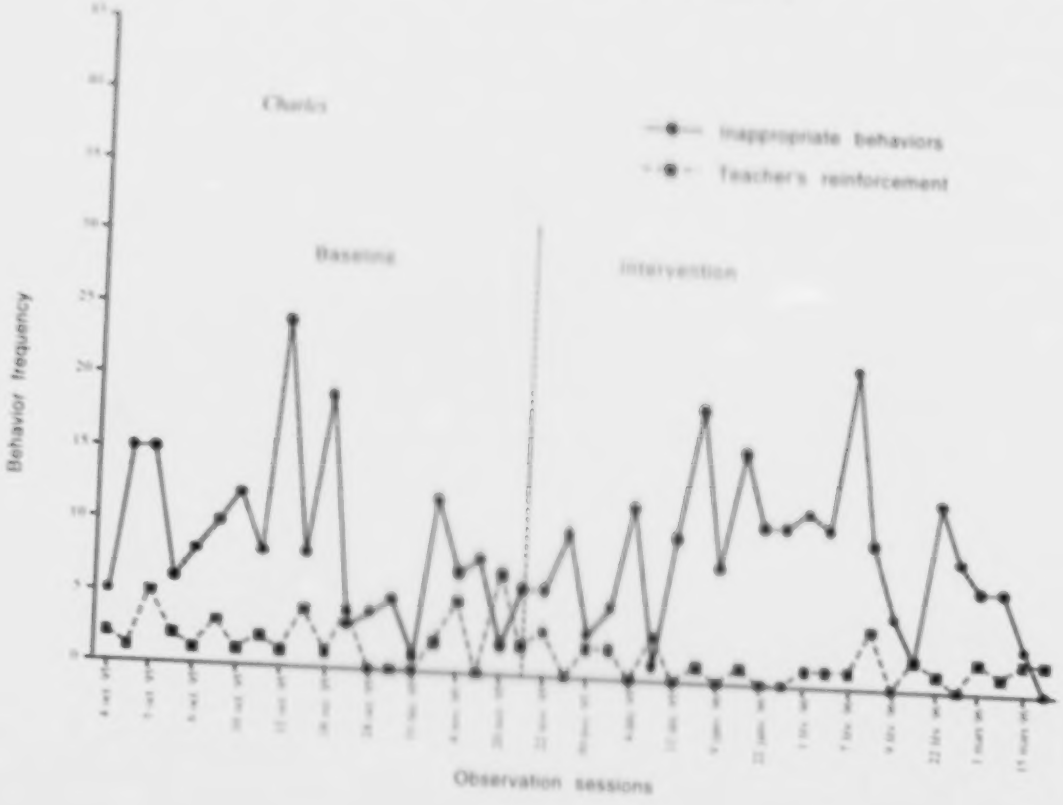

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CONCLUSION

The study's findings are consistent with others studies in this field.

Social skills training participants still meet problems with transferring new skills to the classroom setting; several suggestions may be put forward to explain it

- instruments sensibility may be questioned
- our observation system recorded only inappropriate behaviors, maybe prosocial behaviors observation would be a better reflection of behavior evolution and new skills used.

However, when working with students with behavioral disorders, there is a real problem in building interventions that take place only in school. The complexity of behavioral disorders need extended interventions to other living contexts of adolescents:

- even if parents, teachers and adolescents decide together which skills must be trained, it is not enough,
- nor is social skills training in school,
- school/parent collaboration must involve more efficient interventions
- interventions have to take into consideration the parents needs.

As such, our next research study will experiment a new intervention program:

This innovative program combines school staff action with social workers services (Centre local de services communautaires, CLSC). Parents and their child first participate in family meetings, then parents are invited by social workers to get involved in parent group sessions . Parents are trained in parental competency while their child receives training at school in social skills.

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